

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 NEAE-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 NSAE-00 NSCE-00
SSO-00 USIE-00 INRE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07 L-03 NSC-05
PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 OPR-02 DHA-02 A-01 SY-05
MCT-01 OC-06 CCO-00 OMB-01 TRSE-00 AID-05 /073 W
-----171236Z 079367 /15

O P 171107Z MAR 77
FM AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 394
INFO AMEMBASSY DACCA PRIORITY
AMCONSUL KARACHI PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY KABUL PRIORITY
AMCONSUL LAHORE PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY TEHRAN PRIORITY
CINCPAC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 ISLAMABAD 2595

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, PK
SUBJECT: PAKISTAN POLITICAL SITUATION

REF: KARACHI 1281 (NOTAL)

SUMMARY: PNA CONTINUES TO DEMONSTRATE ITS ABILITY TO MOUNT SMALL-SCALE, INITIALLY PEACEFUL ANTI-GOVERNMENT MEETINGS AND PROCESS-IONS THROUGHOUT PAKISTAN. GOVERNMENT APPEARS TO HAVE DECIDED TO TAKE MORE SEVERE MEASURES AGAINST DEMONSTRATORS. VIOLENT ENCOUNTERS ARE REPORTED FROM MANY PLACES, INCLUDING POLICE FIRINGS IN AT LEAST FOUR CITIES. ESTIMATES OF THOSE KILLED RANGE FROM GOVERNMENT-ADMITTED TWO (IN HYDERABAD AND MARKET TOWN NEAR MULTAN) TO SIX. PERHAPS THE MOST OMINOUS DEVELOPMENT OF THE DAY WAS THE REPORTEDLY TOTALLY EFFECTIVE HARTAL (WORK
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STOPPAGE) IN MULTAN; THIS IS SAID TO CONTINUE. BHUTTO HAS SENT A SECOND LETTER TO PNA LEADERS, STILL GATHERED IN LAHORE, BUT THERE IS NO INDICATION OF ANY BREAKTHROUGH IN POLITICAL IMPASSE AND ALLIANCE SAYS DEMONSTRATIONS WILL GO ON. REPORTS FROM KARACHI AND LAHORE INDICATE THAT THESE WILL ESCALATE IN THOSE CITIES ON FRIDAY, MARCH 18. END SUMMARY.

1. PNA CONTINUES TO DEMONSTRATE ITS ABILITY TO MOUNT SMALL-SCALE INITIALLY PEACEFUL ANTI-GOVERNMENT MEETINGS AND PROCESSIONS THROUGHOUT PAKISTAN. DEMONSTRATIONS WERE REPORTED MARCH 16 IN LONG LIST OF PLACES, FROM ALL FOUR PROVINCIAL CAPITALS TO SUB-DISTRICT (TEHSIL) TOWNS AND EVEN SMALLER OUTLYING LOCALITIES. THE GOVERNMENT FOR ITS PART APPEARS TO HAVE DECIDED TO TAKE MORE SEVERE MEASURES AGAINST THE DEMONSTRATORS. POLICE OPENED FIRE IN AT LEAST FOUR CITIES, LAHORE, KARACHI, HYDERABAD, AND BUREWALLA, A LARGE MARKET TOWN IN THE MULTAN AREA. ONE DEATH WAS REPORTED IN EACH OF THE LAST TWO PLACES. (AN INTELLIGENCE BUREAU SOURCE TOLD A CONGEN LAHORE OFFICER THAT THREE PEOPLE HAD BEEN KILLED THERE. PRESS HAS NOT CARRIED THIS AND WE HAVE NO FURTHER CONFIRMATION. PERHAPS THE MOST OMINOUS DEVELOPMENT OF THE DAY WAS THE RESPONSE, REPORTEDLY TOTAL, OF THE PNA'S CALL FOR A HARTAL (WORK STOPPAGE) IN MULTAN CITY FOLLOWING THE DEATH THERE IN A LATHI CHARGE THE DAY BEFORE OF A YOUNG DEMONSTRATOR. ARRESTS OF SECOND-RANK PNA LEADERS AND WORKERS CONTINUE. THE TOP ALLIANCE LEADERS REMAIN ACTIVE, HIGHLY VISIBLE, AND (SINCE THE BRIEF ARRESTS OF A COUPLE OF THEM ON MONDAY) AT LIBERTY.

2. IN KARACHI, ACCORDING TO AN EYE-WITNESS ACCOUNT OF CBS TV CAMERA CREWMAN DEREK WILLIAMS, BOTH DEMONSTRATORS AND POLICE CHANGED TACTICS FROM THEIR APPROACHES THE DAY BEFORE. DEMONSTRATORS BEGAN PROCESSIONS FROM TWO POINTS, RATHER THAN ONE. POLICE SOUGHT TO STOP PROCESSIONS BEFORE THEY STARTED AND FIRED TEAR-GAS PREEMPTIVELY. OTHER NEW ITEMS WERE USE OF RIOT GUNS, APPARENTLY WITH BIRD SHOT, FIRED IN "GENERAL DIRECTION" OF CROWDS AND DIRECT USE OF TEAR-GAS GRENADES AS WELL AS LAUNCHERS. WILLIAMS ESTIMATED THAT DEMONSTRATORS NUMBERED 2-3,000 AND NOTED RELUCTANCE

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TO SHOOT ON THE PART OF SOME POLICE AND THE NEED FOR OFFICERS TO URGE LOWER RANKING MEMBERS FORWARD IN FACE OF TEAR-GAS TOWARDS CROWDS REMAINING UPWIND. A GOVERNMENT PRESS NOTE, FOLLOWING WHAT NOW APPEARS TO BE AN UNVARYING PATTERN, CLAIMED THAT THE POLICE FIRING WAS PROVOKED BY FIRING FROM THE CROWD. WILLIAMS TELLS US HE GOT GOOD FOOTAGE, AND EXPECTS THAT THIS WILL BE FILMED (AS HE REPORTS PREVIOUS DAY'S SHOTS WERE) ON NETWORK'S MORNING AND EVENING NEWS PROGRAMS.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 ISLAMABAD 2595

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

3. IN MULTAN, THE PRESIDENT OF THE CITY'S CHAMBER OF COMMERCE HAS REPORTEDLY TOLD THE PRESS THAT THE POLICE HAD TRIED TO FORCE SOME SHOPKEEPERS TO OPEN THEIR PREMISES DURING THE HARTAL. HE ALLEGED THAT THOSE WHO REFUSED WERE BEATEN UP AND A LARGE NUMBER OF THEM LATER ARRESTED. HE HAS DEMANDED THEIR IMMEDIATE RELEASE AND HAS SAID THAT HARTAL WOULD CONTINUE UNTIL GOVERNMENT AGREED.

4. USIS CENTER DIRECTOR HYDERABAD REPORTED PREEMPTIVE AND "UN-NECESSARY" USE TEAR-GAS IN THAT CITY BY POLICE BEGINNING AT MOSQUE. PEOPLE RESPONDED BY THROWING STONES AT POLICE IN NARROW STREETS OF OLD, CENTRAL SECTION AND POLICE REQUESTED MAULANAS TO ASK PEOPLE TO STOP STONING THEM. AT DUSK, ELECTRIC POWER IN THAT CENTRAL DISTRICT WAS CUT OFF TO HELP CONTROL SITUATION. USIS CENTER WAS NOT AFFECTED EXCEPT THAT ENGLISH CLASSES AND LIBRARY PATRONS WERE TRAPPED INSIDE FOR TWO AND ONE-HALF HOURS BY DISTURBANCES.
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USIS EMPLOYEES REPORTED SEEING AT LEAST TWO CORPSES AND PREDICT MORE TROUBLE BEGINNING AT MOSQUE TODAY WHEN FUNERAL PROCESSIONS BEGIN.

5. WHILE DEMONSTRATIONS AND CLASHES CONTINUE, THE GOVERNMENT AND THE OPPOSITION CONTINUE TO EXCHANGE MESSAGES. THERE IS NO INDICATION OF ANY UPCOMING BREAKTHROUGH. PM BHUTTO HAS SENT A SECOND LETTER TO THE PNA LEADERSHIP. THE ALLIANCE GENERAL COUNCIL, STILL GATHERED IN LAHORE, WHERE IT HAS CHOSEN PROFESSOR GHAFOR

AHMED OF THE JAMAAT-I-ISLAMI AS ITS NEW SECRETARY GENERAL, HAS SAID THAT IT IS CONSIDERING THE LETTER. (A COMMITTEE OF HARDLINERS HAS BEEN SELECTED TO PREPARE A REPLY.) ACCORDING TO THE PRESS, PNA CHIEF MUFTI MEHMUD SAID THAT IN THE LETTER BHUTTO HAD CONVEYED HIS WILLINGNESS TO DISCUSS ALL THE ISSUES WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE CONSTITUTION. ACCORDING TO HIM, BHUTTO HAD FURTHER WRITTEN THAT UNDER THE CONSTITUTION FRESH POLLS COULD NOT BE HELD FOR THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY -- FOR THAT THE CONSTITUTION WOULD HAVE TO BE AMENDED. MEHMUD REPORTEDLY NOTED THAT THE CONTENTS OF THE PM'S SECOND LETTER WERE NOT SUBSTANTIALLY DIFFERENT FROM THOSE OF BHUTTO'S EARLIER MESSAGE. HE ALSO SAID THAT IN HIS REPLY TO THE FIRST LETTER HE HAD SUGGESTED THAT SPECIFIC ISSUES SHOULD BE MENTIONED FOR DISCUSSIONS, BUT THAT BHUTTO HAD NOT REPLIED TO THIS. WHAT SPECIFIC ISSUES? -- ONLY THE RIGGING OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY POLLS FROM WHICH ALL OTHER THINGS EMANATED. MEHMUD SAID THAT THE PM'S LETTER WOULD HAVE NO BEARING ON THE MOVEMENT LAUNCHED BY THE ALLIANCE; THIS WOULD CONTINUE. MEANWHILE, THE GOVERNMENT PRESS, NOTABLY THE PAKISTAN TIMES, IS SEEKING TO MAKE MUCH OF WHAT IT ALLEGES ARE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN MODERATES AND HARDLINERS IN THE PNS LEADERSHIP. (STORIES ARE OF COURSE DESIGNED, AT LEAST IN PART, TO STIMULATE AND WIDEN SUCH ALLEGED DIFFERENCES.)

6. PRESS, ASIDE FROM GOVERNMENT-OWNED PRESS TRUST PAPERS, CONTINUES TO GIVE GOOD COVERAGE TO OPPOSITION ACTIVITIES AND STATEMENTS. WE UNDERSTAND THAT PM'S SPECIAL ASSISTANT YUSUF BUCH MET WITH EDITORS YESTERDAY AND URGED LOW-KEY TREATMENT OF DISTURB-
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ANCES. IF THIS IS THE CASE, HIS APPEAL HAS NOT YET HAD ANY DISCERNIBLE EFFECT. NAWA-I-WAQT, WHOSE EDITOR IS SAID TO HAVE DECLINED BUCH'S INVITATION, HAS TAKEN TO RUNNING PICTURES OF GARLANDED PNA SECOND ECHELON LEADERS COURTING ARREST. PAPER HAS EDITORIALY PROTESTED ALLEGED HARRASSMENT OF ITS STAFFERS IN DISTRICT TOWNS BY GOVERNMENT AND PPP.

7. REPORTS FROM LAHORE AND KARACHI SUGGEST THAT TODAY'S PATTERN OF EVENTS THERE WILL BE SIMILAR IN TYPE AND SIZE TO YESTERDAY'S. (THOUGH IN A VOLATILE SITUATION SUCH AS EXISTS AT THIS TIME A SUDDEN BLOW UP CANNOT BE RULED OUT.) HOWEVER, ASGHAR KHAN HAS STATED IN LAHORE THAT HE INTENDS TO TAKE OUT A LARGE PROCESSION THERE TOMORROW MARCH 18 (SIGNIFICANTLY A FRIDAY) FOLLOWING AFTERNOON PRAYERS, TO PROTEST WOUNDINGS IN MARCH 16 POLICE FIRING. HE SAID GOVERNMENT WOULD HAVE TO TAKE RESPONSIBILITY IF ANY TROUBLE DEVELOPED. KARACHI RUMORS HAVE IT THAT PNA ALSO PLANS TO ESCALATE ITS ACTIVITIES THERE MARCH 18, WITH PERHAPS 25 PROCESSIONS PLANNED.
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